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Beyond the Margins: Lynne Ramsay's *Ratcatcher* (1999) and *Morvern Callar* (2002)

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Introduction

1 This article will consider the subjective and marginal identities explored in Lynne Ramsay's first two feature length films, *Ratcatcher* (1999) and *Morvern Callar* (2002), and the filmic strategies used by Ramsay to explore these identities. From the geographically "peripheral" location of *Ratcatcher*, to the self-imposed exile of the protagonist in *Morvern Callar*, cultural and social marginalities and the exploration thereof is a thematic concern underpinning both films.

2 One aspect of the exploration of identity in Ramsay's first two films pertains directly to issues of evolving experiences and manifestations of Scottish identity. This is the aspect I will focus on first. Present in each film is a particular attention to personal, subjective identities, engendering images which sit uneasily with those generated by heritage films.

3 The discussion pertaining to *Ratcatcher* will focus on the ways in which Ramsay gives voice to a marginalized community in Glasgow, offering the spectator an alternative image of childhood, femininity, and masculinity than that which still prevails in British social realist film. *Morvern Callar* moves beyond the local and national, foregrounded in *Ratcatcher*, to explore notions of displaced identity and reveal the disjuncture engendered by the diasporic experience and the shifting global economy. In this section Caughie's skepticism about a post-devolution re-birth in identity within Scottish film, and his emphasis on the distinction between identity and subjective identities (Caughie 2007) complements my discussion of the film.

4 Related to the question of subjective identities treated in the first part of this article are the equally salient tropes of nostalgia and the figure in the landscape. Reflective

nostalgia will be seen to be particularly relevant to *Ratcatcher*, while the transformative power of the figure in the landscape, although discussed in relation to both films, is especially enriching in the viewing of *Morvern Callar*.

5 Finally I will draw together lines of connection between the two films, paying particular attention to framing—or in other words to the physical, discernible margins of the film— focusing on the framing of individuals in relation to horizons and the multi-layered meanings of landscape. Particularly informative here is a specifically Scottish historicisation of the motif of landscape, which I introduce by borrowing from Jane Sillar's lucid analysis of Lars Van Trier's *Breaking the* Waves (1996).

6 Sillars evokes "the multi-layered meanings of landscape", and a shift in perspective from a landscape that is appreciated from without, towards "the idea of a landscape experienced from within." (Sillars 135-6) Such an understanding of landscape, especially as applied to *Morvern Callar*, forms a useful line of connection to the notion of subjective identities—and the figuration of both female subjectivities and Scottish identity—evoked by Caughie, and therefore is an idea that will inform my analysis of framing in both films discussed below.

7 Providing theoretical unity and connecting the areas mentioned above, I will consider the films through the optic of a minor cinema. It is generally held now that women's cinema is so diverse as to be no longer contained by the denomination as a "counter-cinema" or defined as merely "oppositional." Instead, an understanding of Ramsay's work can be enriched by borrowing from Alison Butler's use of Deleuze and Guettari's definition of a minor literature. Butler writes: "The plurality of forms, concerns and constituencies in contemporary women's cinema now exceed even the most flexible definition of counter-cinema. Women's cinema now seems 'minor' rather than oppositional." She offers the following definition (of both minor literature, and minor cinema), that it "is not like a literary genre or period, nor is classification as minor an artistic evaluation. [...] A minor literature is the literature of a minority or marginalized group, written, not in a minor language, but in a major one." (Butler 19)

8 It may therefore be most accurate and elucidating—and also less of a transgression against Ramsay's own desire not to be labelled as the next "woman director"—to understand her films as manifestations within a minor film style.

Ratcatcher: offering alternative images of a community

9 Lynnne Ramsay's 1999 directorial feature-length debut *Ratcatcher* depicts a 12 year old boy, James, and members of his community during several weeks of one summer in the mid-1970s, an era marked by striking across Britain. The film is set and filmed in Glasgow's Govan neighbourhood, infamous for poor quality housing and communities—amongst Britain's most "marginal"—experiencing multiple deprivation, which was exacerbated by the decline of shipbuilding and related industries in the post-industrial era. When the narrative commences, many families have already been moved out by the council, while those left behind await their turn to be re-homed.

10 The stagnant waters of a dis-used canal appear to run to a dead end behind the tenement housing in which James and his neighbours live. The edges of the canal are a popular play area for the children of the neighbourhood, and the dramatic event upon

which the rest of the narrative depends takes place here. During a moment of rough play fighting James retaliates by shoving his friend Ryan further into the canal's murky waters and running away, thus accidentally killing his friend, who drowns.

Absence of a monolithic national identity

11 In an interview following the critical acclaim of *Ratcatcher* Lynne Ramsay stated, "I don't want to be called the next Scottish director or the next woman film-maker." (Kuhn 82). And yet, so bleak is Scottish film history in terms of women film-makers, that Ramsay's 1999 feature length debut was only the second feature length film[1] directed by a woman in Scotland. Considered somewhat rudimentarily from the mere perspective of statistics, it therefore becomes difficult to disassociate her extraordinary achievement, success and talent from her gender and nationality.

12 It is clear that a handful of Scottish directors—of which Ramsay unquestionably is one—have enriched the cinematic landscape, most spectacularly since 1995 but also in the preceding decades. They have provided a much-needed indigenous, internally generated perspective of Scotland to counter the previous decades of external representations that have dominated the screen, and the public's imagination, both in Scotland and abroad.

13 However, Ramsay's resistance to being labelled as "the next Scottish director" invites reflection on the limitations of the "national cinema" paradigm. Song Hwee Lim, in his writings on the oeuvre of Taiwanese director Ang Lee, reminds us of the crucial evolution in film studies affected by Higson, Appadurai, and Naficy, amongst others, and particularly that in recent years "scholarship in film studies has increasingly acknowledged the limitations of the 'national cinema' paradigm to the extent that, if it is not entirely jettisoned, it must at least be problematized, rather than taken as a self-evidential category of analysis" (Lim 2012, 129). We will return to the questions this raises later, in relation to both films.

14 Glasgow born and raised, Ramsay is a filmmaker whose point of entry into the industry is intimate, personal, even marginal, as compared with the mainstream central motivating forces of marketability and commercialisation that drive the industry.[2] Furthermore, highlighting the value of acknowledging the geographical and historical specificity in Ramsay's film, Annette Kuhn affirms, "there is no ignoring the salience of *Ratcatcher's* Glasgow setting." Aside from the biographical resonance of the Glaswegian bin men's strike seen through the eyes of a child, even the tone of the "children's geographies" within the film, which Kuhn charts and explores (2008 pp. 69-76), owe "much to the peculiarities of tenement architecture, with its merging of indoor and outdoor, public and private spaces." (Kuhn 80).

15 This willingness to explore what Kuhn describes as children's geographies, and the way in which the tenement setting interacts with the child's perspective combines to provide images of both children and family that have hitherto only been glimpsed at the margins of the canonized Scottish national identity.

16 From the film's opening shot (which precedes the afore-mentioned drowning) of Ryan (Thomas McTaggart) spinning, shrouded in a net curtain at a window, the level of framing (the camera positioned at the child's height) indicates sympathy with the child's perspective.

17 This positioning with the child's perspective aligns the film with earlier manifestations of minor film such as Italian neo-realism, evoking the child protagonists of De Sica's *Sciusià* (1946) or Rossellini's films of the same era. Although it would be crude to compare Berlin post-Second World War with 1970s Glasgow, the tragic fate that awaits Ramsay's child protagonist in some ways parallels the haunting trajectory of the child Edmund in Rossellini's *Germany Year Zero* (1948).

18 Returning to the first frames of *Ratcatcher*, foreshadowing the tragedy to come, light fills the screen to gradually reveal a young boy shrouded in white, rotating slowly just inches from the camera's lens. The spectator glimpses the child's mouth gaping as though gasping for breath under water or plastic. The almost imperceptible jump-cut editing of this shot adds to its jarring effect. The sense of foreboding that underlies this moment of ostensibly innocent childish play is matched by the hypnotic allure of the rotating motion and distant sound of children, until the child's reverie, and ours, is suddenly interrupted by a startling smack from the boy's mother, and Ryan's shriek.

19 This transformation, through the perspective or the gaze of the child, of the banal into the sublime, or heightened real, which is then periodically interrupted or destroyed by crude, unsentimental or uncouth interjections of parents, siblings or other children offers a dialectic that punctuates the film.[3]

20 The positioning of the regard from and towards perspectives and actions more usually accorded minor significance, such as child's play, not only admits multiplicity (in terms of identity and subjectivity) but also acts as a structural leitmotif informing Ramsay's aesthetic choices, contributing to her distinctive style of *cinécriture*[4], reliant on the orchestrating and interweaving of a powerfully mesmerising contrast between the poetics and the brutality of the everyday (which operates through the representation of child's play and transforming participation of the imagination).

21 Beyond noting that Ramsay accordingly gives voice to marginalized agents in cinema and society (children) this also raises the question: what is the significance of the child, in particular in the context of Scottish cinema?

22 In the recurring trope of the child—often an orphan, or with one absent parent—in Scottish film, Neely (2008, 158) and Riach (1996, 79-80) find evidence of Scotland's still incomplete quest for sovereignty, an issue which it is noted has also become an increasingly resonant feature of the contemporary world. Likewise Petrie (2004, 162-184) advances the idea that the recurrence in Scottish fiction of the child is a metaphor for the absence of an independent Scottish nation-state.

23 It is interesting then to note that of the two children who die in the film, the father (Mr Quinn/James Ramsay) of the first was literally absent when his son died, having abandoned his wife and child and subsequently been imprisoned, whilst the father (George Gillespie/Tommy Flanagan) of the second is figuratively absent even when present, as when at home, he is most usually inebriated to one degree or another.

24 But what is to be said of the fact that not only does the child recur here, but that both of these children die, one killed and the other killing himself? To answer this, we can look more closely at the representation of James' almost-always absent father. In stark contrast to the fearful regard that directors such as Peter Mullan cultivate towards the dominant male protagonists of their films[5], an irreverent, fearless gaze upon the father is encouraged in *Ratcatcher*. He does not inspire respect amongst his progeny: drooling as he passes out in front of the television, his youngest daughter says "look at the state

ae him", as the rest of the family settle comfortably in front of the "telly" now that "Da" has passed out.

25 Similarly, the father's 'heroism' in saving another local boy, Kenny (John Miller), from drowning, is undermined by the irony with which the plot frames this isolated act of bravery. The re-imagined past screened in *Ratcatcher* thus indicates a shift in what Petrie has described as the "overt masculinisation of Scottish culture", undermining its excessive dramatization of "physical and emotional hardness, brutality and aggression" (Petrie 2004, 164) by showing this very hardness and brutality to be ineffective. Furthermore, reading the deaths of the sons (in the context of the ineffectiveness of the men) as a metaphor for a complete rupture in male identity, the future of such an image of masculinity is seen to have reached a dead-end, this hardness and brutality both undermined and shown to be fatally self-defeating.[6]

Reflective nostalgia: longing for a home not known

26 Finally—confirming yet again the mode of escapism that haunts Scottish films—James too, like so many other protagonists of Scottish narratives before him, chooses to "escape" through death, by drowning himself in the same place where his friend drowned. In a dream sequence at the end of the film that is framed on either side by the shot of James drowning, James imagines his family and himself moving into the newly built houses he stumbled upon during the summer. Having chosen to reject the present and the future, the dying child's last moments of consciousness are of an imaginary future: his family moving into a new home. However this is a new home which both the spectator and James know is already off-limits to the boy, as his final visit there was one of disappointment. The windows had been placed and the door locked, so that James, left standing outside in the rain, could only peer in through the window.

27 The longing that James experiences may be understood then as a marginal form of nostalgia, one reliant less on the *nostos* (return home) which Svetlana Boym describes as restorative nostalgia, than on the *algia* (longing) which she describes as a characteristic of reflective nostalgia, which itself is, in Emma Wilson's analysis, an "ironic and painful contrast to the championing of family (and national) values of restorative nostalgia." (Wilson 2003, 14)

28 According to such an understanding of nostalgia, the reflective nostalgia that underpins the emotional landscape of the film, and its contrast with restorative nostalgia, casts doubt on the possibility of espousing a monolithic family (or national) identity. Thus we find here an admission of fracturing in the nation-identity, further confirmation of the presence—reinforced through the symbolism inherent in the deaths of two of the narrative's children—of the shattering of something: a future, a family, a nation.

29 Furthermore, the dying child's reflective nostalgia for an unattainable future—an imaginary event, finally being re-housed—is also a bitter indictment against government policy and systemic failure to cope with the crippling housing shortage that further decimated and marginalised the already suffering working classes in the post-war decades.

30 The expression of the fracturing of the nation-identity and the shattering of a future which James's reflective nostalgia communicates is underscored by focusing on the

framing of the individual, as touched upon briefly in the introduction. The dominance of water as both a physical tactile element in the film and as a visual leitmotif in the landscape surrounding James can be enriched with Jane Sillars' description, in landscape painting, of the "individual staring at horizons denied" to them. At its most positive, *Ratcatcher*'s final frame—of a field framed by the un-finished dream home's kitchen window—is the horizon that is denied to James. More pessimistically, marking the film's unwillingness to locate a redemptive solution, James is often framed staring into the dark waters of the canal, unable to let go of the traumatic memory therein contained. The culpable anguish which holds him at the water's edge, until he chooses the ultimate route of irreversible escape—through suicide, by entering this horizon—renders all other horizons definitively inaccessible.

Personal exile in *Morvern Callar*

31 As equally salient in Scottish and independent film as the recurring trope of the child discussed earlier, is the increase in narratives the dramatic tension of which revolves around issues of "displaced identity" and "diasporic and migratory experience" (Petrie 2000, Neely 2008, 158). This is one of the recurring motifs of the second film I will focus on in this article: *Morvern Callar.*

32 Crucial to the notion of a minor cinema, in relation to women, is the idea of "displacement, dispossession … de-territorialisation" (Butler 20). Certain aspects of *Morvern Callar*, including that of actor performance and narrative, seem to embody the idea of a de-territorialized state of being. The main character's self-imposed exile and errant wanderlust articulate the sense of "not belonging," while the film's position at a crossroads of multiple genres further emphasizes this aspect.

33 Ramsay's second feature-length film *Morvern Callar* (2002) is based on Alan Warner's 1995 novel of the same name. From a formal perspective, the film integrates elements of the road movie and female buddy film, as well as being claimed as "experimental" and "European arthouse." As in *Ratcatcher*, this narrative too begins with an ending: Morvern is framed lying on the floor next to her lover's corpse, illuminated softly and intermittently by the blinking lights of their Christmas tree.

34 Relevant to the persistent echo in film of the image of Scotland as a "fatherless" nation, and so underlining Scotland's status as politically marginal and peripheral to London's centre, it may be of interest to scholars to note that, confirming yet again the prevalence of the orphaned child in Scottish narratives, Morvern's lover's suicide is not Morvern's first encounter with the death of a loved one. Later in the narrative, when at the Spanish resort, Morvern meets a young man whose mother has just died. In a gesture of empathy intended to comfort him, she offers to tell him about her "foster mum's funeral". Thus it is revealed that the central protagonist has been doubly orphaned as a child.

Suppression of Oban dialect

35 Warner's novel was written as Morvern's "intensely subjective" first-person narrative in what Caughie describes as "West of Scotland vernacular" (Caughie 2009), while Neely prefers the term "Oban dialect" (Neely 160). However for the screen adaptation an English actress, Samantha Morton, was chosen for the role of Morvern. Controversially,

although Morton could have performed in a Scottish accent, Ramsay invites Morton to retain her Nottingham accent for the film (much as Andrea Arnold's direction of Michael Fassbinder in *Fish Tank* (2009) permits him to play his role in his authentic Irish-accented English). This casting decision engendered criticism, reliant on an interpretation suggesting that the suppression of the Oban dialect that was such a distinctive feature of the novel negates the film's cultural specificity.

36 This move could also be interpreted as an avoidance of marginality, given that accent and dialect reinforce potentially alienating "geographic and temporal borders, (by) firmly locating narratives in precise locales." (Dwyer 304) Furthermore, it is conceivable that the choice of Standard English instead of Oban dialect was also due to concerns of the marketability of film in the Scots language varieties (which of course we could consider marginal language varieties). This is thus a reflection of what John Corbett describes as "the tension between authenticity and comprehensibility (which) is an ongoing concern for productions that are shown outside Scotland."

37 Illustrating this point, the Scots dialogue track of Ramsay's previous film *Ratcatcher* renders some of the exchanges difficult for audiences outside of Scotland to decipher, thus implicitly undermining cinema's claim to universality. The Standard English spoken by Samantha Morton in *Morvern Callar* on the other hand is the language of Hollywood—which has "promoted the universalization of the English language as *the* idiom of speaking subjects." (Dwyer 304) Hence one could conclude that this choice serves to reassure or re-affirm the notion of cinema as universal (thereby rejecting marginality, in terms of identity) just as the lack of dislocation Morvern experiences when in a foreign context seems to suggest an ease of transferability and immigration in the contemporary world.

38 Indeed, according to Neely, by placing an English actress in the central role, instead of capitalising on the success of Scotland as a brand, the reach of the film transcends the small town location of North Eastern Scotland, as Morton's accent and outsider status in relation to the Oban community places her on a par with migrants and immigrants anywhere.

Performance and reception-transformation

39 Beyond the accent or dialect, some critics interpret the absence of a voiceover in the film to be equivalent to withholding Morvern's voice, thus contributing to the "silencing of Morvern's first-person narration (and) undermining her authority in the film". (Neely 160)

40 As an alternative reading, I suggest instead that the absence of voiceover is in fact a fairly well-worn strategy of "freeing" the female character, enabling her to remain elusive and unknown so that she resists definition. Furthermore, rather than indicating a suppression of the female voice, this choice allows the narrative voice to be shifted beyond the conventional visual or audio margins of the film, freeing Ramsay to develop other cinematic strategies. Ramsay's choice to stray from conventional practices by exploring cinematic strategies beyond the literary device of explicit narrative voice can be appreciated as a characteristic of minor cinema: inflecting and adjusting established cinematic traditions, "thinking" film in the Deleuzian sense.

41 It is of particular interest to focus on the roles of performance and soundtrack, beginning with performance. Classical Hollywood has accustomed the spectator to the

subtext of power, strength and authority associated with silence in the performances of male actors, as seen historically in the roles of the Western hero, or its more recent ethnic variation, the Italian-American gangster/Godfather. Morvern, like the silent male cinematic characters before her, similarly frequently dismisses verbal communication.

42 Some critics have difficulty with this aspect of Morton's performance, and John Caughie (2012, 11) regrets the absence of a "consistent guiding, interior monologue" that was provided by the first person narrative voice of the novel. However, in the silence of her performance, Morvern/Morton is not alone. Indeed, it seems relevant at this juncture to recall that critics have been quick to cite Bill Douglas as a precursor to Ramsay's first film, *Ratcatcher*. Although the comparison has been made for reasons other than the actors' performance, the often withdrawn, predominantly silent and taciturn performances of the young male actors (Stephan Archibald and William Eadie, respectively) in both Douglas's *Childhood Trilogy* and in *Ratcatcher*, is noteworthy here, as their (male actors') silence is widely accepted as poignantly communicating the child's emotional distress.

43 Samantha Morton's non-verbal expressivity clearly conveys a multitude of emotions, guiding the spectator through emotional landscapes that range from solitude, regret, sorrow, boredom, contempt, to playfulness, tenderness, delight, desire, and euphoria. Despite this, demonstrating the power of reception-transformation her silence has been characterised as 'listless' and 'flat'. It is as though the sexual and social power relations against which Feminist film theories were founded are barely escapable forty years on: "Men act and women appear" (Berger 47). But, perhaps because Morvern does not "appear" in an eroticised context, she is sometimes difficult to see.

44 The supposed "affectlessness" in the film identified by critics such as Hoberman (2002) is called into question by Liza Johnson (2004). She argues that the film and character can conversely be discussed as "absolutely flooded withand traumatically overwhelmed precisely by—affect." (Johnson 1362). Focusing on the regard, and specifically of that between Morvern and her lover, much of her analysis is informed by what she describes as a "broken circuit of exchange" (1362-3) brought about by his suicide. The removal of the lover's familiar gaze—and thus the removal of a contingent reaffirmation of identity—is defined as a crisis around which the film is "fundamentally structured, narratively and visually" (1362). The exchange of gaze, or lack of it, becomes pivotal to this reading.

45 New circuits of exchange are also considered by Johnson, leading her to suggest that, in a manifestation of wish fulfilment the "primary gaze of the film (is defined) not as Morvern's but as that of the impossible reverse angle, the point-of-view shot of an ant." (1365)

46 Johnson's analysis of *Morvern Callar* is less convincing when enriched by Tomkin's (1963) and Sedgewick's (1995) theories of interest and shame, in relation to the gaze. According to Tomkins, "the pulsations of cathexis around shame ... are what enable or disable so basic a function as the ability to be interested in the world." (245) Thus Johnson describes what she perceives as Morvern's oscillations between interest and disinterest, engagement and mute reticence, to be structured by her experience of shame and its ensuing disablement of the ability to be interested in the world.

47 While fascinating, in relation to *Morvern Callar* the application of theories of shame seem to negate the presence and expression of grief, paired with the themes of death

and rebirth. In fact the insistence on shame leads Johnson to misinterpret (in our opinion) some of the film's images, so that when Morvern, after burying her lover's corpse, "reaches into a small puddle to touch a worm" Johnson writes that Morvern is "feeling for some kind of contact with this *unlikely* object of choice, a sentient, creeping little grub" (1361, emphasis mine). I would counter that the worm is clearly a visual metaphor for death and decay, as is the maggot on a carrot that catches Morvern's eye in the vegetable aisle at work later on. These are visible reminders of the transformation that the body she once held, caressed and loved is submitted to now.

48 Close attention to proximate objects therefore becomes synonymous with shame and "looking from a place of depressive lassitude" (1363). This sits uneasily with the many instances in the narrative that are manifestations of Morvern's curious—sometimes even joyful—renaissance of pleasure in seeing and being. In fact, an alternative viewing of the film suggests not "looking from a place of depressive lassitude", but instead that Morvern is not dissimilar to James in *Ratcatcher*, acting as a vehicle for the expression of an appreciation of what Ramsay calls "the sublime in the everyday" (Ramsay in Kuhn 85). Poignantly, Morvern communicates the co-existence of seemingly contradictory emotions, and a raw appreciation of the sublime, spinning in the sunlight enveloped in music from her headphones just after burying her lover, perhaps in celebration of her own ephemeral existence.

49 Confirming the transformational power of the spectator's regard, the process of reception-transformation continues with critics underlining what they perceive as a lack of agency. Specific examples of this include: "Morvern has no agency" (Martin-Jones 56); and astonishingly, "... things happen to Morvern, she acts without the narrative logic of motivation." (Caughie 11)

50 In an otherwise astute analysis of the film, Caughie's statement concerning the narrative logic of motivation, and his insistence that "things happen to Morvern"—which itself suggests the passivity stereotypically assigned to women—does not resist a closer viewing of the film (although it may be justified in reference to the novel). There are numerous contradictory examples of agency and narrative logic of motivation in the film. Considering only the most striking, which provides an example in fact of both, it is difficult to conceive of how—after days of mourning and inaction—sawing one's lover's corpse into pieces and then carrying the chunks of rotting flesh on one's back into the woods to bury them (as Morvern does in the film) could possibly be construed as something that just "happens to Morvern," rather than being instead both an incontrovertible example of her deliberate, if staggeringly macabre agency, and *also* required by the logic of the narrative (she must dispose of his body in order to assume aspects of his material and creative identity).

51 Further substantiating these arguments in relation to the presence of agency, and particularly undermining Martin-Jones' assertion that "Morvern has no agency," Morton's performance and the intertextual references to films such as Agnès Varda's *Sans toit ni loi* (1985) are clearly contradictory to any notion of lack of agency. Instead, intertextual references inferred through both visual and biographical similarities between the films' respective female leading characters situate the role of silence within the film in a feminist tradition of defiance and resistance. For example, Samantha Morton's physical appearance in the film echoes that of Sandrine Bonnaire as Mona in Varda's film, while both young women share a wanderlust which fuels their rejection of the stultifying existence of their dead-end jobs. Mona is described by the

Sans toit ni loi narrator to have emerged directly out of the sea, "*il me semble qu'elle venait de la mer*" thus evoking Aphrodite, who also emanated from the sea. Morvern meanwhile shares her name with that of a peninsula that juts into the sea, just across the water from Oban (and the village of Connel, where the novel's author grew up), thus suggesting that she too (Morvern) may have emerged from the sea.

52 Yet, as Smith observes, Mona is an "anti-Aphrodite" "smelly, dark and of undefinable shape" who spends much of her time alone, in contrast to Aphrodite's magnetically exquisite female beauty and throngs of admirers (Smith 37-38). Aspects of this description clearly resonate with Morvern, who also seems equally equipped to resist even the most carefully attentive attempts of others (both within the narrative and beyond) to define her. When the improbably exotic taxi taken by Morvern and her friend Lana (Kathleen McDermott) is brought to a halt in the middle of a southern Mediterranean village's carnivalesque procession, and the girls step out into the midst of a collective celebration whose pagan undertones resonate with Lana's drug-fuelled euphoria, the echo between the two films is further reinforced.[7]

The relationship between soundtrack and fluidity of the gaze

53 In order to explore the link between minor cinema's notion of de-territorialisation and the shifting perspectives explored in admitting subjective female identities, I pursue with an analysis of one of the Spanish sequences, and discuss the repercussions this has on interpreting the figurative value of the female character in landscape.

54 Morvern offers Lana and herself a package holiday at an anonymous destination in the south of Spain (the filming location is Almeria, Andalucía, on the Costa del Sol). This first Spanish destination is effectively an "anywhere" space, an example of what Marc Augé has identified as a "*non-lieu*", a place devoid of anthropological markers (cf. Augé 1995). Like Augé's hotels or Hainge's airports (Hainge 201-3), the high rise blocks of tourist accommodation and the packaged activities on offer to Morvern and Lana in a place that is culturally neither Spain nor quite Britain, bear instead a closer resemblance to the homogeneous, indistinct and mass-produced space of the Oban (or anywhere) supermarket which Morvern intended to get away from. But unlike Augé's hotels and the function of the *non-lieu*, the package holiday as depicted in *Morvern Callar* epitomises also, I would suggest, post-industrial patterns of consumption that extend beyond the consuming of material products to encompass also the consuming of experiences ("holidaying"). This consumption en-masse of a pre-manufactured "holiday experience" is seen through Morvern's eyes to be an exercise in "not-being." Bored and disenchanted with the spectacle of young Brits clubbing, she transgresses the socially accepted (and limiting) mode of "tourism" or "travel" that her community and social circle permits when she grabs Lana, their bags and a taxi, and leaves the resort in a quest to discover an "authentic" Spain.

55 In a key scene that follows Morvern and Lana's exodus from the *non-lieu* of the resort and across the wilderness of Almeria, we will see that Ramsay offers alternative structures of desire and fluidity of the gaze which, interestingly, are marked as fluid through aural boundaries as well as visual.

56 This is in keeping with feminist concerns for re-thinking gender relations and the representation of women. Indeed, Ramsay's experimentation with sound and other sensorial domains of experience subvert the dominance of the "regard" that prevails in

phallic discourse. Irigaray has noted that the dominant phallic discourse assigns a passive role to women: "*son entrée dans une économie scopique dominante signifie, encore, une assignation pour elle à la passivité: elle sera le bel objet à regarder*." (Irigaray 25)

57 Ramsay subtly shifts emphasis away from the scopic (visual) to the aural/audio, thereby offering an alternative to the dominant economy, in order to depict Morvern's subjectivity not as fixed and passive, but as fluctuating, unstable, continually evolving beyond pre-determined margins established by an externally imposed identity, or by the dominance of the regard.

58 Away from the comforting familiar-ness of the resort, and once the insulating safety bubble of ecstasy has been deflated, Morvern's friendship with Lana begins to falter, the latter suspecting that Morvern is not the same as her, but actually as "weird" as the foreign, destabilising surroundings. Contrary to Lana, Morvern enjoys the strangeness of the desert landscape and accepts the lack of unity which is so clearly made manifest through language difference when locals are encountered. She is unshaken by "the ultimate untranslatability of difference." (Dwyer 307)

59 As the gulf between them widens following a spat (Lana withholding the means to light a cigarette), Morvern decides to leave her friend sleeping in the desert, and the lack of synchronicity between them—or the revelation of the faltering of a false foundation—is paralleled on the soundtrack. The shift in Morvern's subjective reality is thus mirrored by the soundtrack; the oscillation between inner landscapes and outer, between centre and margins, between subjectivity and identity is reflected and crystallized in the soundtrack and cinematography.

60 As Morvern walks away from the sleeping Lana (effectively "breaking free" from the identity that her friend would "pin" on her) the music is heard as an extra-diegetic, overwhelming, full stereo experience, but then, as Morvern draws closer to the camera, the music simultaneously draws away, the sound of her footsteps crunching on the gravel path becomes distinct, and we experience the sound of the song as tinny, of poorer quality, and as Morvern is nearly upon us, as though we are bystanders overhearing the music from her headphones.

61 We may not know what it is to *be* Morvern as she travels through the film's diegesis (which some critics find frustrating), but we do catch glimpses of experience through her. As Caughie has noted in relation to an earlier sequence of shots of Morvern entering the Oban supermarket: "we move from inside Morvern to outside, from Morvern as a subject listening, to Morvern as an object of the image." (Caughie 3-20)

62 Morvern's subjective identity, her personal subjective world, is shown through a shifting of aural boundaries and audible margins, to surpass the externally constructed and imposed national/social/class identity that Lana (or anyone) would attempt to ascribe to her. Indeed this is made verbally explicit towards the end of the film when the friends are back in Oban. Morvern invites Lana to leave with her again, but her friend refuses saying: "It's the same crap everywhere, *so don't dream*" (emphasis mine). Thus her circle of friends attempts to deny her, not only anything different, but even the possibility of *imagining* anything differently, in an attempt to control the personal subjective world, so that it conforms to the externally imposed identity.

63 The absence of voiceover, compounded with the blurred lines between diegetic and non-diegetic sound, even false diegetic-sound, only retrospectively identifiable, effectively plunges the spectator into a constantly shifting object/subject perspective,

hinged on uncertainty and resisting the stability of a fixed point of view. This then mirrors the relationship between subjectivity and identity, as Morvern's being (subjectivity) is always exceeding what we think she may be (the identity we seek to attribute to her).

64 Despite the admonition of her best friend, Morvern resists all attempts to quash her desire to explore. As Artt has usefully surmised, "Morvern's journey is personal, but it is about traveling to a place inside the self, a place that is without limits and without borders—an inner journey that mirrors her physical journey of fearless exploration." (Artt 6)[8]

Shifting significations of framing in the landscape

65 Drawing together complements between the two films, we can focus on framing of the individual in relation to horizons. We have already seen that *Ratcatcher* refuses a redemptive solution, and that as the narrative progresses, the character is increasingly denied the horizons he desires (the horizon seen and accessed through the window of the new house), until he is subsumed by the horizon that haunts him (the water's edge finally enveloping him as he drowns).

66 Morvern Callar's narrative is similarly structured around a death, but Morvern's relationship to horizons is altogether different. Earlier in the film she too is framed as Sillars' "individual staring at horizons denied" to her, but this dynamic shifts as the narrative progresses. She is increasingly able to determine not only what the horizon contains, but also its position, by dictating the trajectory to be followed. Indeed Morvern is not denied horizons, but pursues new horizons, disappearing (from the spectator's view) off-screen, exceeding the confines of the frame and of the film's celluloid margins.

67 The differing significations accorded in the films to the framing of characters in relation to the landscape in which they survive take on a particular resonance if read in conjuncture with Sillar's analysis of the shifting significance to be found in the meaning of landscape. Writing of the means of transformation coming not from without, but instead from within the main character (Bess, in Lars Von Trier's *Breaking the Waves*, 1996) she evokes the "multi-layered meanings of landscape, its capacity to contain different experiences." Most especially, she identifies a shift, in Scottish landscape painting, away from the European tradition of an external perspective, "a perspective from outside, an uninhabited wilderness, a tourist view" towards the exploration of "the idea of a landscape experienced from within, one charged with the possibilities of change and transformation, not fixed but continually shifting and the subject of remaking." (Sillars 135-6)

68 This exploration of landscape experienced from within, with its transient and transforming relations between centre and margin, self and other, are revealed as perpetually unstable and evolving in *Morvern Callar*. We might conclude that the margins that matter are those which can be shifted, re-written, explored and transformed.

Conclusion

69 As critics have duly noted (Petrie, Caughie, Murray, etc.) historically in film, Scotland has often played the role of a magical place whose landscape and locals are invested with a transformative power. Historically, this has covered a wide range of functions: the eerily depicted Hebridean inhabitants' nefarious intentions of transforming the outsider in *The Wicker Man* (Robin Hardy, 1973) contrast sharply with the benevolent rural Scottish locals and locale that provide a touching antidote to modernity in the hands of Bill Forsyth (*Local Hero,* 1983).

70 Ramsay's works shift the spectators' attention towards representations of identity that are increasingly more profoundly personal and intimate, yet nevertheless universal. It would appear that she offers the spectator a vision that is less ensnared in the questions of national representation that have been such typical characteristics of the "Scottish predicament."

71 Acknowledging the concept of culture and our conception of the past as in permanent flux, and therefore breaking free from the limitations for representing gender that is incumbent in referring to a "static past", in *Ratcatcher* Ramsay re-imagines a key moment in British history, the point of transition between industrialisation and post-industrialisation in a salient geographical situation, Glasgow. She brings social concerns, such as the housing shortage and insalubrity, to the forefront. The "hardman" subgenre of Clydesidism is subverted, as she eschews a quest for a monolithic national identity, a national identity that might be construed as something tangible, to be adhered to and to be proud of.

72 In both films, Ramsay admits marginalised identities and perspectives, in *Ratcatcher* offering fractured images of fragmented moments in childhood, and providing filmic space for the interplay between the constant encounter between imaginary and real, poetic and caustic, innocent and adult. In *Morvern Callar* the spectator is involved in an elliptic encounter with Morvern's subjectivity, as Ramsay pushes the exploration of the use of sonar elements and formal strategies to communicate the disjunctive nature of the modern experience of non-lieu and of diaspora. Linguistic boundaries or actual borders are portrayed as somewhat fluid, as Morvern moves beyond these potential margins or frontiers. And finally, as we have seen, in both films femininity is relegated neither to a symbolic nor to a marginal role.

73 It seems relevant to return once again to Lim. One of the arguments that Lim makes—given that we live in an age of mass migration, not only of people, but also of ideologies, culture, and capital—for considering not only nations, but also national cinemas to be unable to "sustain (their) myth of uniting, coherence, and purity" is of particular relevance here. As can be seen in relation here to *Ratcatcher* and *Morvern Callar*, acknowledging the erosion of unity, coherence and purity, as Lim suggests, and thus admitting an expression of alternative, or marginal subjective identities allows the spectator to appreciate the particular nuances and specificities of what Lim describes as "national and cross-border filmmaking." (Lim 129)

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NOTES

1. Margaret Tait's *Blue Black Permanent* (1992) was the first feature length Scottish film directed by a woman.

2. This had been made explicit in interview in the 1990s when she first won an award at Cannes, for her short film(s), *Small Deaths.* While excited for the recognition, she had been shocked by the tone of much of the festival, in which films were discussed as items of trade, and filmmakers were required to talk about the unique selling points of their work. "That really scared me... You've got to think about your own reasons for making films. Not other people's reasons." (McKay 2011)

3. My analysis is somewhat congruent with Annette Kuhn's (2008). However Kuhn sees the film as weaving "together several levels of 'reality' (...) documentary, drama of working-class life, social history (...)" (Kuhn 17), finally concluding that "there is no single world in the film" and thus that "the question of narrative resolution is something of an irrelevance". (Kuhn 18)

4. I borrow the term *cinécriture*, a combination of the words of cinéma and écriture (writing) "cinewriting" from Agnès Varda. It evokes the imaginative process of "writing" a film, which involves more than words.

5. Cf. for example John's father in *Neds* (2010), played by Mullan himself, or Joe when drunk and violent in Loach's *My Name is Joe* (1998).

6. Despite portraying the adult male protagonists varyingly as ineffective, irresponsible, immature, violent, abusive, alcoholic and thuggish, there is an underlying tenderness and vulnerability glimpsed in both of the fathers, and the young James is depicted as sensitive,

intelligent, tender, and nurturing. While the gangs of young boys have the power to instil fear in the younger children, the women and girls of the film are not portrayed as threatened by the male characters, but rather mocking of them or slightly disgusted by them.

7. Prior to the film's diegesis, Mona/Bonnaire quits her job as a secretary in Paris, and is last seen in a village in southern France, after having been unpleasantly surprised by a pagan-like harvest celebration.

8. This recalls Luce Irigaray's incitement to women to embrace personal freedom and agency: *« Faites ce qui vous vient, ce qui vous plait : sans ' raison', sans 'cause valable', sans 'justification' [...] Vous avez tant de continents à explorer que vous donner des frontières reviendrait à ne pas 'jouir' de toute votre 'nature'.* (Irigaray 202)

ABSTRACTS

So bleak is Scottish cinematic history in terms of women directors that Lynne Ramsay's award-winning *Ratcatcher* (1999) was only the second Scottish feature directed by a woman. This paper focuses on a range of marginalities (marginal discourses, communities, representations, filmic strategies, etc.) in Ramsay's first two feature length films: *Ratcatcher* and *Morvern Callar* (2002). The discussion pertaining to *Ratcatcher* explores the ways in which Ramsay gives voice to a marginalised community in Glasgow, whilst also offering the spectator an alternative image of femininity than that which still prevails in British social realist film. Then, focusing on *Morvern Callar,* attention is accorded to the marginal, alternative and experimental strategies engaged in by Ramsay as a filmmaker, notably soundtrack and fluidity of the gaze, and the power of reception-transformation is touched upon. Finally, the formal and diegetic motifs relating to the expression of personal and cultural exile—other forms of marginality—provide the opportunity, through a focus in particular on framing and identity, to draw together lines of connection between the films, and reflection on the transient and multiple characteristics of marginality.

L'histoire du cinéma écossais est si rude en ce qui concerne les cinéastes féminins que *Ratcatcher* (1999), film primé, de Lynne Ramsay est seulement le deuxième long-métrage réalisé par un cinéaste femme. Cet article cherche à explorer une variété de marginalités (discours, communautés, représentations) qui sont présentes dans les deux premiers long-métrages réalisés par Ramsay: *Ratcatcher* et *Morvern Callar* (2002). La discussion autour de *Ratcatcher* se concentre, premièrement, sur la façon dans laquelle une 'voix' est accordée à une communauté marginalisée de Glasgow, et deuxièmement sur l'image alternative de la femme dans ce film, qui est ainsi distinguée d'autres productions écossaises et britanniques de la même époque. Ensuite, se concentrant sur *Morvern Callar,* l'attention se porte sur les stratégies filmiques 'marginales' et expérimentales employées par Ramsay, notamment en ce qui concerne la bande son et la fluidité de point de vue. Enfin, les motifs diégétiques et formels liés à l'expression de l'exil — personnel et culturel — fournissent l'occasion de tisser de multiples liens entre les deux films.

INDEX

Keywords: Scottish film, childhood, feminine journeys, performance, soundtrack
Mots-clés: cinéma écossais, enfance, voyages féminins, interprétation, bande son

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